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## NOTES AND COMMENTS.

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### THE ETHICS OF GREAT STRIKES.

**ALTHOUGH** strikes are generally wasteful methods of gaining desired ends, the conclusion cannot be justified by the experience of labor organizations that they are always harmful in their results and influences. Organization and coöperation are the surest means by which labor can demand its rights, and strikes in a just cause should be simply the determined expression of organized resistance. The waste which is always involved in a strike is simply a law of human progress.

Labor organizations have accomplished great concessions for the workingmen, and strikes and lockouts, as a feature of them, must be credited with their due share of the victory.

Strikes in England and the United States present a long list of losses, and when the statistics are first presented the impression is gained that they do a tremendous amount of harm, and accomplish little or no good. The loss falls heaviest and most directly upon the laborers, but eventually the mill-owners and capitalists feel the result of a strike. Fifty years ago the term was hardly known in the English language, but during the last half century it has become loaded with a weight of meaning which must be heeded. So rapidly have strikes followed each other, and on such gigantic scales, that about one hundred million dollars have been lost in wages by the working population in the present decade, while destruction to property and mill-owners must aggregate much more than this sum.

In the great strike of 1852, in which the Amalgamated Engineers of England struck against overtime and piece-work, the loss of wages was tremendous, and the cost to the society during the three months of the strike amounted to over \$200,000. In 1853-54 the spinners struck at Preston, England, and the loss of wages to the 20,000 laborers easily aggregated \$15,000,000, while the union, it is estimated, lost actually in money over \$3,000,000. In 1859 twenty-four thousand laborers in the building trade began a strike which lasted nearly a month, occasioning a loss of many hundreds of thousands of dollars. The Welsh colliers' strike in 1873 lasted nearly four months, and two years later 60,000 men in the same district remained out for about five months. The exact amount of loss through these strikes has never been fully estimated, but the waste must have been tremendous.

In 1877 there was a general movement among laboring men throughout the world to secure better pay and shorter hours, and the masons of London stopped all business in their line for nearly a year. Masons were obtained from Germany and Belgium, and the London strikers lost through wages nearly half a million dollars. The year 1878 was also famous for its large

strikes, notably those of the spinners of Lancashire and the engineers of Liverpool and Birkenhead.

In the United States similarly large and momentous strikes have marked the history of labor organizations and unions. In 1877 the most violent and sanguinary strike was witnessed in this country, when the railway servants throughout a good part of the country struck to prevent a reduction in wages. The strike ended in riots, and it is estimated that \$40,000,000 worth of property was destroyed, and many lives. The loss through the men's wages was on a proportionate scale. In 1882 the ironworkers in the United States conducted an extensive strike, which lasted for several months.

There is another loss brought on by strikes which is not always considered. It acts harmfully on the community, and sometimes a severe strike will drive a trade or industry completely from that part of the land. As notable instances of this, mention might be made of the shipbuilding trade at Dublin, the lace trade at Nottingham, and the silk trade at Macclesfield. Many of England's cotton manufactures have been forced to America, while it is well known that France and Belgium have stolen a good part of her machine-making works.

The loss falls upon three different classes. The common laborers and strikers feel it first, then the capitalists or mill-owners, and finally the community itself.

The success or failure of the strikes cannot be measured always by the actual results in dollars and cents. Neither is the accomplishment or failure of the purpose desired always the criterion by which to judge. The vast majority of the strikes have failed. A compromise or slight concession has been more often the chief thing acquired. The individual strikes have only helped to make up a solid wall of resistance to oppression, and in the aggregate they have wrought good.

But the seeds of the discontent were sown by the early English law when efforts were made to compel laborers to work. Soon after the great plague in England all labor was scarce and high. The government then, in the supposed interest of the industries, attempted to fix the wages of workmen, and imposed severe penalties upon those who demanded or received more. Subsequent legislation made every man or woman who had no property or visible means of support work at a fixed sum for any employer who desired his labor. The pillory and the method of cutting off the ears were the penalties imposed upon those who refused to labor for their masters. These selfish enactments bred a feeling of hatred among the laboring men against their employers, and every attempt to fix the rate of wages by the government signally failed. The workmen were forced to give more than a just equivalent for their wages. Efforts to secure higher wages, or fewer working hours per day, followed, and until 1825 these coöperative attempts were punished as conspiracies.

It was from such a beginning that strikes developed. By coöperation and strikes the laborers removed many of the difficulties in their way, and the true success of labor-unions and their accompanying strikes must be judged by a comparison between the condition of the laboring classes of to-day and that of one hundred years ago. The general trend of the labor movements has been so decidedly towards an improvement in the condition of the workmen that success rather than failure must be conceded to them in the aggregate. Strikes were necessary in the early days when arbitration was unknown. Arbitration is the civilized method of settling labor difficul-

ties, but the public mind had to be educated up to it at first. Strikes were as justifiable in the days when labor was not protected by law as wars are when one nation oppresses a weaker one. They played their part in the great labor history of the world by preparing the reasoning mind for a better appreciation of the rights and wrongs existing between workmen and their employers.

If arbitration was the natural outcome of strikes, the day has nearly passed when the latter should be attempted. Where there is determined oppression and tyranny strikes will still be ordered. There is an ethical side to them, then, which makes them justifiable. It is a sure indication that labor has reached a higher standard than industry, and that it is necessary to return to semi-civilized methods to teach the latter the spirit of the age. But where strikes are ordered without giving arbitration the chance to settle the dispute then labor invites the condemnation of all upon the cause.

GEORGE ETHELBERT WALSH.

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#### POLITICS AND THE WEATHER.

IT HAS been at times a consolation to me to reflect that the weather depended solely on the caprice of fortune, and not on the will of my fellow men. Perhaps some one may think that this is immaterial, and that it can make no difference whether an unpropitious sky is due to human agency or not. No difference indeed! It is the same difference that exists between a sick bed and a torture chamber. But, alas! man is trying to lay his sacrilegious hand on the clouds and wring water from them at his pleasure. But it is the social and political aspect of the subject that I wish to consider.

It is clear that private and so-called irresponsible persons could not be suffered to try experiments in rain making at their own sweet will. No man could be permitted to deluge his neighbor's washed clothes or discourage his young turkeys for the sake of refreshing his own lettuce beds. To allow every man with a can of dynamite to make rain whenever he wanted to would be absurd and unbearable. It is evident that the matter must be in the hands of the government, for, if not, the course of the weather might be seriously disturbed by differences of policy, or even by local jealousy. There would be nothing, for example, to prevent the Governor of New York from drenching New England on Fast Day because the delegates from Massachusetts had knifed him at the last Presidential convention.

No doubt it will be a good while before the officers in charge of the rain-making apparatus have acquired enough experience to produce satisfactory results; but this would be of more importance in some other countries than here, where new men are appointed to office every four years and the oil of consecration imparts an immediate capacity for office. No doubt also there will be a good deal of grumbling; because in matters that interest everybody it is impossible to please all the world, and some men are sure to talk about corrupt bargains and wicked jobs. But no such slanders will be generally credited; for if our system of political parties has the disadvantage of making half the people listen credulously to malicious tales about public men, it has at least the merit that the other half will never believe anything evil of their rulers. On the other hand, in a country mercifully free like ours from bureaucracy and red tape, the weather will not be regulated by rigid principles, but by elastic ones, so that it can be adapted to the varying wants of the people; that is, of the people in the scientific sense. I say scientific sense because the popular use of the word is entirely wrong and leads to great